



CONNECTICUT COALITION to
END HOMELESSNESS

257 Lawrence Street, Hartford CT 06106 | P (860) 721-7876 | F (860) 257-1148 | www.cceh.org

**Labor and Public Employees Committee Hearing
Tuesday, March 15th, 2022**

**Testimony in Support of Raised Senate Bill No. 422, AN ACT CONCERNING THE
ESSENTIAL WORKERS COVID-19 ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

Senator Kushner, Representative Porter, and distinguished members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee, thank you for hearing my testimony today in support of **Raised Senate Bill No. 422, An Act Concerning the Essential Workers COVID-19 Assistance Program**. My name is Sarah Fox, and I am the Chief Operating Officer of the CT Coalition to End Homelessness. I speak today representing a broad coalition of more than 100 organizations across Connecticut who are all committed to a common goal of achieving an end to homelessness. Our coalition includes non-profit providers of homeless services, as well as housing agencies, private sector businesses, and concerned citizens.

CCEH stands alongside our partners in the Reaching Home Campaign in recognition of the extraordinary contributions made by front-line staff to keep our most vulnerable citizens safe during the pandemic, and we thank you for your support of these workers. Frontline workers, including those that support homeless shelters, have been critical in combating the spread of the COVID virus and helping to keep our Connecticut communities healthy and safe. I am here today to ask you to make homeless response workers eligible for the CT Essential Workers COVID-19 Assistance Fund.

The current statute, PA 21-2, Sec 289 (2), states “Essential employee” means any person employed in a category by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices as of February 20, 2021, to receive a COVID-19 vaccination in phase 1a or 1b of the COVID-19 vaccination Program.”

The website to apply for the Essential Worker Relief Program links to the interim list of categories of essential workers outlined by the CDC. However, by both the statute and design of the Essential Worker Relief Program online application, homeless service providers are classified as 1c under shelter and housing and are, therefore, unable to qualify/apply through the online application. We respectfully request that workers who fall under category 1c be included in the Connecticut Essential Workers COVID-19 Assistance Program.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the communities, cities, and the State expected and required these essential workers to step up to a new challenge and work on the frontlines of the emergency response to care for those most vulnerable to the virus while putting themselves and their families at risk every day to keep the larger community safe. Shelters were asked to increase their hours and coverage operation to be 24/7, which put staff at an increased risk. Whether coordinating testing and vaccines, providing shelter services, isolation, and quarantine space, or moving people into housing, the contributions of the frontline staff in the homeless response system have been vital and essential. We also know that frontline staff and those fulfilling essential roles throughout the pandemic are disproportionately people of color.

Making front-line homeless response workers eligible for the CT Essential Workers COVID-19 Fund Homeless, is a necessary recognition of the immense personal sacrifices these workers have made throughout the pandemic. Our essential workforce showed up every day to keep our most vulnerable neighbors safe, protecting our communities, often putting both themselves and their families in harm's way. Providing these workers with access to benefits including lost wages, out-of-pocket medical expenses, and burial expenses for those who contracted COVID-19, became ill and were unable to work, or died, is an important opportunity to return the favor and make sure they have access to the relief they deserve for their heroic efforts.

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to present this testimony, and for your hard work making important and life-saving decisions as we look to shape Connecticut's future beyond the pandemic.

Sincerely,

Sarah Fox
Chief Operating Officer
CT Coalition to End Homelessness
sfox@cceh.org